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Influence of family factors on reading habits and interest among level 2 pupils in national primary schools in Malaysia

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to identify the relationship and influence of family factors on the reading habits and interest among level two pupils of National Primary Schools in Malaysia. The family factors analyzed in this study were family income, parents education level, parents occupation, parents encouragement to read and home reading environment. Two methods of data collection were employed namely survey method and interview. A questionnaire consisting of 48 questions was utilized as the survey instrument. A total of 275 level two primary school pupils participated in the survey. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS Version 14.0. The statistical analysis used were t-test, Analysis of variance, Spearman Correlation and Pearson Correlation. Survey results revealed that there was no significant difference between family income and reading habits and interest. There is a significant difference between fathers' occupation and pupils reading habit and interest. The research established that family factors strongly and positively influence pupils reading habits and interest.

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Keywords: family, influence, reading habits, interest, pupils.

1. Introduction

Throughout the past four decades, Malaysia has implemented many efforts to overcome problems related to the reading habit. The ability to read and write is seen as the most important basic in education and development of the country. In fact, we are now in a new world facing with overwhelming experience and social change. The terms like new world, new literacy and new learning are themes which are interconnected. Hence, as a preparation to enter the 21st century, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has designed an education system according to the present needs and future aspirations. In relation to that, the comprehensive National Education Philosophy (FPN) is designed to realize the country's vision.

A reading society is a successful society. The attempt to develop a society that has a lifetime habit of reading is fundamental in the formation of an innovative, creative, and viable nation. This reading habit can create a reading nation. Reading nation will then produce skilled manpower that has the ability to adapt to changes and learn new skills. Workforce that is dynamic, productive and talented in various fields will determine the achievement of the national aspirations. Obviously, the plan to develop a reading society is a cornerstone in achieving Vision 2020.

1.2 Background Research

"Reading is training for the mind". Learning to read is very much appreciated and well considered by many cultures and ability to read is regarded as the most basic objective in education. Among those who can read, most of them spend their leisure time by watching television, listening to the radio, or taking part in other recreational activity. The research on the ability to read and practice in children ranging from 10 years and above conducted by the National Library of Malaysia (1996) shows that 93% can read but only 87% have reading habit. An obvious pattern of findings of this study is that the older they (Malaysians) are, they read the lesser. Almost 50% of children ages 10-14 years old are not interested in reading.

This scenario is associated with another problem known as 'reading reluctance' where those who know how to read, do not want to read. The problem of 'reading reluctance' has started to replace the problem of illiteracy which will affect all levels of education and socio-economy. Many campaigns such as 'Reader and Community Continue Reading Society' have been launched. Unfortunately, Malaysians' reading habits and reading interest still have not reached an impressive level. Chakravarthy (1998, 1999) proves that family plays a role quite effective in fostering children's reading habit. According to Chakravarthy (1997), family lifestyle, relationships between children and parents at home and family socioeconomic status will have a close relationship with the Nurturing of reading habits and interests. Chakravarthy also expresses her concern over the drastic changes that occur in the structures of a family when more women are working nowadays. What will happen to the children who are left at home? Who will protect and guide them? In fact, according to Chakravarthy (1997), it is difficult for parents to find time to communicate with their children. The study of Chakravarthy (2001) has shown that intimate reading between a mother and a child will give a positive impact in raising the child's interest in reading. Hence, it is apparent that parents have great responsibility in fostering reading habits and interest in their children.

1.3 Problem Statement

In 1957, only 50% of Malaysian society knows how to read. In 1994, the rate is 78.4%. The government's objective is to achieve the rate of 100% by the year 2000. However, this objective has not been achieved. There are two questions arise as shown below need to be given serious attention:

1. Do all the pupils in primary schools reach the level of reading skill that is expected by the MOE?
2. Do all the students who have mastered the reading skills have the interest to continue reading as a habit?

1.4 Objectives of Study

This study is conducted to identify the influence and relationship of family factors and reading habits and interests among students in Level 2 at National Primary schools in Malaysia.

Specific research objectives are:

- . To identify the relationship between academic achievement of parents, encouragement of parents and the environment at home with the reading habits and interests of children.
- . To identify the differences between job of parents, family income with the reading habits and interests of children.

1.5 Reviews On Related Readings And Researches

This study was carried out based on the sociologist idea, Pierre Bourdieu (1986) who identifies three categories of capital which affects the social class mobility ----- economic capital, social capital, and cultural capital. In addition, Emotional Capital which is introduced by Helga Nowetny (1981) in Gillies (2006) also seen as an important capital that affects researched issues. Bourdieu has a strong stance that the economic capital is the most basic capital and other capitals are derived from it. Economic capital is playing an important role in ensuring

children get a variety of literacy experiences. Low ability to consume will affect lifestyle and interests of family members, including students who become the main respondents in this study.

The influence of family socioeconomic factors cannot be ignored when discussing about a social phenomenon. Family background is an important factor determining the success of a child in learning certain positive behavior (Hung and Marjoribanks, 2005), including reading habit. Facilities and reading environment which are conducive at home that helps in the nurturing of reading habit can be associated with capitals given by Bourdieu. Children with better reading facility will achieve higher reading ability. Family encouragement has an important impact in the literacy development of children. According to Hayes da Chokievicz (2006) and Macionis (2004), study habits also occur outside the classroom and parents, siblings and relatives have the role as facilitator in guiding children in order to achieve extensive reading performance outside the classroom. Experience in the formation of pre-school reading habits and interests can be linked directly with the cultural capital of a family. Basic requirements of reading habits start at home. The pre-school experience is actually including the experience of attending kindergarten classes, experience of acquainting reading materials at home and the guidance provided by family members.

1.6 Research Methodology

This study is a research using quantitative and qualitative approach to explain the influence and relationship of family factors in reading habits and interests among Level 2 students at the National Primary schools in Malaysia. In this study, data triangulation and methods are used to strengthen the study design. To conduct this study, non-random sampling or purposive sampling is used to obtain samples. Family background or academic achievement in school of the selected category samples will not be taken into account. However, the sample was selected among students who can read only.

A total of 275 Level 2 students, i.e. 105 students from a city school, 55 students from a suburban school and 115 students from the estate school are the selected samples and they are being asked to answer a set of survey questions about themselves, parents, reading environment at home, reading habits, reading interests, and encouragement from parents to read. The justification for the selection of samples from the three areas is that the same opportunity are given to students from these areas. Besides that, students who come from these three areas are in the same socio-economic status. Most family leaders are working as labourers and factory workers. Only 10% of the family leaders from the city school has better socioeconomic class such as teachers, clerical and other professionals. Subjects were given 50 minutes to answer all 48 items. Respondents are told by researchers that this study is confidential and their answers will not be seen by anyone.

1.7 Analysis And Findings Of Study

About 158 respondents are female students, i.e. 57.5% of total respondents. 117 respondents are male respondents, i.e. 42.5%. 243 respondents, or 88.4% use the Malay language, 20 people (7.3%) use Mandarin, 2 (0.7%) use Tamil language as the main language at home and 10 people (3.6%) use other languages at home. About 62.5% of respondents, i.e. 172 people come from families earning more than RM530 and above. About 136 respondents, i.e. 49.5% have fathers who worked in the medium class of occupational categories while 12 fathers, i.e. 4.4%, belong to the high class and 5.8% of respondents' fathers, i.e. 16 of them are not working.

About 64 of them are from the poor class, i.e. 23.3% and 69 of them are in the middle class, i.e. 25.1%. Only 2 of them, i.e. 0.7% work in high class of occupation categories. 59.9% of respondents' mothers, i.e. 140 people are not working. About 10 fathers, i.e. 3.6% belong to the category of no education. 47 fathers (17.1%), educated as at primary schools only. 167 of them, i.e. 60.7% are being educated as far as secondary school. 28 of them, i.e. 10.2% received education at colleges. Another 23 of them, i.e. 8.4% of them are being educated in university level. 22 mothers, i.e. 8.0%, have no formal education. 48 (17.5%) of them received education at primary school level. 163 of them (59.3%) are educated to secondary school level only. There are 24 mothers (8.7%) received education at colleges. 18 of them, 6.5% have university education.

1.7.1 Hypotheses Test

Ho 1: There is no significant difference between the family's monthly incomes with student's reading habit.

The min for incomes of RM 529 and below is 3.0954 and the standard deviation is 0.38057. The min for incomes of RM 530 and above is 3.1901 and the standard deviation is 0.40834. The difference of the min is -0.09475 and the difference of the standard deviation of -0.02784. The result shows from the t-test is that $p = 0.0057 > 0.05$. Hence, Ho 1 failed to reject.

Ho 2: There was no significant difference between the family's monthly incomes with student's interest in reading.

The min for incomes of RM 529 and below is 3.0825 and the standard deviation is 0.54708. The min for incomes of RM 530 and above is 3.2070 and the standard deviation is 0.48203. The difference of the min is -0.1245 and the difference of the standard deviation is 0.06505. The result shows from the t-test is that $p = 0.050 = 0.05$. Hence, Ho 2 failed to reject.

Ho 3: There is no significant relationship between father's academic qualifications with student's reading habits.

Spearman rho's correlation test shows that the value of $p = 0.144$ is significant because $p = 0.017$, i.e. < 0.05 . This means that the null hypothesis is rejected at a 95 percent of certainty level because there is a significant relationship between father's academic qualifications with student's reading habits.

Ho 4: There is no significant relationship between father's academic qualifications with student's reading interests.

Spearman rho's correlation test shows that the value of $p = 0.162$ is significant because $p = 0.007$, i.e. < 0.05 . This means that the null hypothesis is rejected at a 99 percent of certainty level because there is a significant relationship between father's academic qualifications with student's reading interests.

Ho 5: There is no significant relationship between mother's academic qualifications with student's reading habits.

Spearman rho's correlation test shows that the value of $p = 0.167$ is significant because $p = 0.005$, i.e. < 0.01 . This means that the null hypothesis is rejected at a 99 percent of certainty level because there is a significant relationship between mother's academic qualifications with student's reading habits.

Ho 6: There is no significant relationship between mother's academic qualifications with student's reading interests.

Spearman rho's correlation test shows that the value of $p = 0.257$ is significant because $p = 0.000$, i.e. < 0.01 . This means that the null hypothesis is rejected at a 99 percent of certainty level because there is a significant relationship between mother's academic qualifications with student's reading interests.

Ho 7: There is no significant difference between father's occupations with student's reading habits.

The min for low class is 3.0985; middle class is 3.2396, and high class is 3.2500 and those who are jobless is 2.9701. ANOVA test results shows that $(F(3, 271) = 4.054; p = 0.008 < 0.05)$. Hence, Ho 7 is rejected.

Ho 8: There is no significant difference between father's occupations with student's reading interests.

The min for low class is 3.0838; middle class is 3.2649, and high class is 3.3083 and those who are jobless is 2.9750. ANOVA test results shows that $(F(3, 271) = 3.724; p = 0.012 < 0.05)$. Hence, Ho 8 is rejected.

Ho 9: There is no significant difference between mother's occupations with student's reading habits.

The min for low class is 3.0953; middle class is 3.1916, and high class is 3.1000 and those who are jobless is 3.1643. ANOVA test results shows that $(F(3, 271) = 4.054; p = 0.551 > 0.05)$. Hence, Ho 9 failed to reject.

Ho 10: There is no significant difference between mother's occupations with student's reading interests.

The min for low class is 3.0875; middle class is 3.1710, and high class is 3.4000 and those who are jobless is 3.1850. ANOVA test results shows that $(F(3, 271) = 0.699; p = 0.553 > 0.05)$. Hence, Ho 10 failed to reject.

Ho 11: There is no significant relationship between parents' encouragements with student's reading habits.

Pearson's correlation test shows the value of $r = 0.417$ is significant because $p = 0.000$, i.e. < 0.01 . Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected at a 99 percent certainty level.

Ho 12: There is no significant relationship between parents' encouragements with student's reading interests.

Pearson's correlation test shows the value of $r = 0.550$ is significant because $p = 0.000$, i.e. < 0.01 . Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected at a 99 percent certainty level.

Ho 13: There is no significant relationship between environments at home with student's reading habits.

Pearson's correlation test shows the value of $r = 0.464$ is significant because $p = 0.000$, i.e. < 0.01 . Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected at a 99 percent certainty level.

Ho 14: There is no significant relationship between environments at home with student's reading interests.

Pearson's correlation test shows the value of $r = 0.552$ is significant because $p = 0.000$, i.e. < 0.01 . Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected at a 99 percent certainty level.

The qualitative study have answered the research question:

- i. What is the input of parents' encouragement and home environment towards the reading habits and interests?

Research findings show there is a fairly significant difference between the encouragement of parents with students' reading habits and interests. Students who receive more encouragement from parents are more exposed to reading habit. This is evident among students who listen to stories from their mother ever since before going to school. Although not many of them, fathers are also encouraging the development of habits of their children. Lack of varieties for reading materials also influences students' reading habits and interests.

In terms of reading atmosphere, the facilities and equipments have their role in promoting reading habits and interests. Environment at home which is comfortable and conducive to students will stimulate them to read. However, interview results find that all students agree that reading habit is important to their future.

1.8 Discussion Of Findings

Studies have shown that family monthly income does not affect the reading habits and interests of students studied. Findings of this study conflict with the study of Avis (2005) which relates the economic capital with having enough money in the family's savings. According to him, without a strong economic capital, parents cannot provide a conducive learning environment to their children. Findings of this study support the studies made by Hung and Marjoribanks (2005). An academic qualification of a father does have a positive correlation with the level of reading among their children. This study also supports the findings of Chakravarthy (1998) that 91.3% of children learn to read before going to school. Findings of this study support previous studies done by Hung and Marjoribanks (2005), and the OECD report (2002). According to the OECD report (2002), mothers of higher education can contribute through their daily interactions with their children. Mothers can provide a better opportunity to read for their children.

Research findings support the idea that socio-economic status is the foundation in the formation of children's habits. Father's occupation is a dominant factor in determining the economic capital, social capital and cultural capital within a family. Father of a higher class of work can provide various reading materials to children because they have greater knowledge about the benefits of reading as a result of their social networks. Descriptive analysis shows 140 mothers (50.9%) do not work. A total of 133 (48.41%) belong to the low and middle class of work. Therefore, the influence of mother's occupation in this study does not correspond with previous studies done by Bowen (2006) who considers the occupation of mothers (and fathers) also determine the socio-economic status of the family. Findings of this study correspond with studies done by Bowen (2006), which is the involvement of parents are related to the children's higher achievement in reading. Implementation and strengthening reading habits and interests occur effectively when given a robust and continuous encouragement by parents. Findings of this study support research conducted by Marimuthu (1975) who considers the process of children learning to read begins earlier than the formal education. Children require initial mastery of literacy skills at home. This study also supports the theory that emphasizes the importance of conducive environment to become good readers.

1.9 Conclusion

Parents should be responsible to try to improve the socio-economic status and poverty that reduces educational opportunities of their children. Parents from poor class should also be given serious attention by the government. Government has a huge responsibility in ensuring farmers and labourers in factories are given a fair amount of salaries and other incentives. Parents also should adopt the attitude of love to read. They should be the role model.

Children learn a habit by imitating adults in their environment. Telling stories and discussing about it can stimulate students. If parents can take the time to sit with their children, the initial efforts to foster the reading habit will be successful.

Studies have shown that the nurturing of reading habits and interests depend on a lot of reading experience at home. At the same time, findings indicate many students rely on school libraries to obtain reading materials. Therefore, it is relevant for the Parents and Teachers Association (PTA) to act as a body that connects the two parties plays a role in cultivating this habit and interest in reading among students. PTA can organize seminars or friendly meeting between teachers and parents to discuss methods in encouraging the reading habits.. Hence, family harmony must be preserved so that efforts to create life-long reading community will become a reality. The integrity of the family institution must be preserved at all times so that children will be on the right track in shaping their future. Reading habits and interests in a family will bring great potential in fostering the relationship between parents with children and thus will be able to avoid children from choosing the wrong lifestyles.

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